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## Female Babies and the Development of the Woman's Psyche: A case study in infant observation

*Clare Yu-hua Lin*

Ancient Chinese tradition - written by men - suggests that a good woman should obey three rules and possess four virtues: she should obey her father before marriage, her husband during married life; and her sons in widowhood. Her four virtues should be fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech, and efficiency in needlework. The message speaks the fate of women who are not supposed to be autonomous, but subordinate to and dependent on men. Chinese grandmothers sigh out to their daughters: 'women's life is like Yiu-Ma seed (rapeseed) - wherever it falls it grows.' This implies that woman's life is without freedom. Her life belongs to the family into which she marries. Her future is determined by her husband. According to Chinese tradition, the married woman is 'the spilled out water,' and this symbolises that she disappears after marriage.

That men are treated as more valuable than women is manifested in many Chinese traditions. The birth of a son is called 'Jang,' an ancient jade ornament used in State ceremonies. The birth of a daughter is called 'Woa,' a less valued tile or earthenware. Concubines or court ladies of the emperor in ancient China competed to bear sons for him. Sometimes they killed their girl babies or stole sons from other concubines in order to please the emperor. The concubines who did not bear sons would be expelled or lose his favour.

Such stories remain a familiar part of family life in modern Chinese tradition. A mother-in-law will mistreat a daughter-in-law who does not bear a son. A daughter-in-law who has not borne a son will remain silent if her husband has an affair with another woman. Often, mother-in-law promotes such an affair. And this tragedy often continues in mainland China today. When it was decreed that one family can only have one child,

many girl babies were killed or aborted because the family wanted to have a son to carry on its family tradition. In Taiwan and other areas which follow Chinese tradition the pressure was less and the tragedy lessened. Nevertheless, the pressure to bear a son is still great among Chinese women. Sons are considered the carrier of their family's tradition. With the custom of having only two children in one family, there is increasing anxiety in the mothers during their pregnancy that they might give birth to a girl.

In reflecting on these traditions, one finds that the mother-in-law or grandmother plays a major role in determining women's fate. The novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, by Amy Tan, tells the true stories of four women who struggled to come to the USA to search for their womanhood. Refusing to surrender to the society that either despised them or rejected them, they carried their poor self-images and low self-esteem to the new land, hoping to rid themselves of the evil quality within, and to create a new womanhood. Unfortunately by not allowing their daughters to be *themselves*, they once again became the persecutors who made their daughters the victims of the masculine power inside them. The daughters struggled to rid themselves of their persecutory mothers' influence, but, to survive, they finally had to surrender to their mothers' unconscious wishes.

Only when women learn to forgive themselves will they be free of the malignant oppressive qualities inside them, and be able to give back to their daughters the freedom to grow.

This article is about a baby girl, whose mother internalised a Chinese cultural perspective and failed to celebrate her birth. It is based on an observation of a Chinese mother-infant couple, observed once a week, wherever the baby stayed with her caretakers. After the observation, the author discussed the notes of the infant observation notes with her supervisor, Pamela Berse Sorensen, at the Under Fives Study Centre at the University of Virginia, making use of fax and telephone. The analysis which follows is based on object relations theory, with particular emphasis on the Kleinian approach.

Klein (1927) described two innate powerful forces: first, love and the drive to reparation; second, hate, greed and aggression. These emotions first appear in the early relation of the child to his/her mother's breast. (Henceforth 'her' will be used to refer to both genders). The baby loves her mother when the mother is satisfying her needs for nourishment. But when the baby is hungry and her desires are not satisfied, or when she is experiencing bodily pain or discomfort, hatred and aggression are aroused,

and the baby becomes dominated by the impulses to destroy the person (or object) that frustrated her. (Klein & Riviere, 1936.) Love and hate are struggling together in the baby's mind. Infants face these cycles of gratification and frustration by a constant use of the mechanisms of projection and introjection (Klein, 1948, p. 31).

According to Klein the baby's earliest capacity is that of primitive phantasy. Pleasant phantasies accompany satisfaction; destructive phantasies accompany frustration and feelings of hatred. When a baby feels frustrated, she attacks the breast; but if she is being gratified, she loves the breast and has pleasant phantasies about it. Based on her observation and play therapy, Klein (1927, 1959) discovered that the psychic worlds of infants and young children were filled with primitive and savage conflict, murderous and cannibalistic tendencies, and excretory and erotic urges.

Klein described two developmental positions. The first is the paranoid-schizoid position. Under the influence of frightening phantasies of annihilation in which life is under threat, the infant needs to split her good and bad experiences with the breast. In other words, the phantasies of a feeding, loving, creative and good nipple need to be kept distinct from phantasies of a nipple which is biting, hurtful and terrifying (J. Segal, 1992 p. 33). In this developmental position destructive impulses and persecutory and sadistic anxieties dominate. The baby has low tolerance of frustration and her emotional reactions range between the extremes of good and bad. Through splitting, the infant banishes the badness by projecting her own hate and terror, thus seeing the world as dangerous and destructive (St. Clair, 1996).

The second position described by Klein is the depressive position, in which the baby's awareness of objects are more whole. She tries to integrate both loving and hating characteristics in her caretaker. Conflicts between different parts of the self are no longer solved by splitting, but by attempts at integration and at holding them within the self. The baby is then able to hold on to the mental representation of the absent mother as good. The infant experiences guilt when realising that the attacking object is the good object, and desires to make reparation to the object for previous attacks (Segal, 1992).

The following observation describes how the grandmother and the mother of a girl baby internalised the cultural perspective which devalues women; and how the baby girl handled the frustrating and painful emotional world that she experienced with her mother through projective identification.

## Family background

The mother is in her 20s and teaches at a college. This is her first baby. It is the Chinese tradition that the mother stays at home for a month to recover from the delivery either in her paternal or maternal parents' house (most mothers prefer to stay with their own mothers if they are allowed to do so.) During this time the husband stays alone and goes to work during weekdays. At weekends sometimes he comes to visit the mother and stays overnight with her. After this month, the mother returns to work and stays with her husband.

In the family being observed, both the mother and father work full-time, and they therefore hired a baby-sitter to take care of the baby during the day. In this presentation, the author tries to demonstrate how cultural attitudes are transferred from one generation to another through interactions between 'the cultural psyche,' and personal psychic processes in the mother.

## The baby at seven days old

The baby was only seven days old when I began my first observation. The mother led me to a Japanese-style bedroom. I followed the mother, took off my indoor slippers and climbed into the Japanese bed. In the left hand corner I saw the baby lying. She was covered with a heavy blanket. I could only see one third of a very tiny head from where I knelt. I moved closer to the baby and saw baby's whole head. The baby slept face down with her face turned to the left. The mother said that she might wake up at any time. As soon as the mother started to talk, the baby burst out with two very soft cries, and then fell asleep right away. The mother said that she needed to be fed soon.

The mother then began to tell me what a traumatic and shocking experience it was to deliver a baby. She said that it felt as if she had just triumphed in battle. She said that she has never dreamt that one goes through such agony and pain during the delivery. The mother herself had been a nurse and teacher at the Department of Nursing. She complained that the textbooks had cheated her since they had failed to warn her how painful the delivery process would be. 'Those textbooks are wrong,' the mother said. 'I don't trust those books any more. They are useless. I will have to write my own textbooks.'

Fifteen minutes later the baby slowly woke up with a mild cry as if she was half-asleep and half-awake. The mother decided that it was time to feed

the baby. She took the blanket away from the baby, leaned over toward her, held her head with her left hand, and supported her bottom with her right hand. When the baby was picked up, she opened her eyes. I moved closed to the baby and took a close look at her. She looked very delicate. Her mouth was small and beautiful. She had two full cheeks, and looked very elegant. The mother held the baby's head on her left hand away from her body, and lay the baby's body on her legs. She put the nipple of the bottle in the baby's mouth, but the baby was not sucking. The mother then shook the bottle, and tried to suggest to the baby to suck. After a couple of tries, the baby began to suck very softly as if she was pretending that she was sucking. The mother continued to coerce the baby to suck by turning the bottle. The baby then began to suck more regularly but very slowly, as if she was not hungry. The mother said that it sometimes took an hour to finish feeding the baby.

When asked about breast feeding, the mother said: 'I only breast fed her four times. Those nurses at the hospital were so cruel. They woke me up at eight o'clock in the morning while the baby and I were still so tired. Without thinking, they brought the baby to me and wanted me to feed the baby. I was so tired and could hardly move, but still I had to try to feed the baby. The baby was very tired too. She could hardly open her eyes. But those nurses they did not care about how the baby felt. They just want me to feed the baby according to their schedule. Well I managed to feed the baby. The first time she sucked very slowly. It was OK. But then she began to suck so vigorously. It caused a lot of pain on my nipple. She bit so hard when she sucked. It hurt. The textbook did not say how hurtful it could be when the baby sucks on them. After four feeds, my nipple began to develop blisters. The textbook did not tell me what to do. I stopped the breast feeding then.'

Up until now I (the writer) still did not know whether the baby was a boy or a girl. I had hesitated to ask about the baby's gender for fear that the mother might not be able to accept the baby's gender if she was a girl. The mother had shown how terrified and depressed she was when she realized the baby in her womb was a girl. She strove to keep her baby's gender a secret from everyone including her husband, afraid that they might be disappointed and begin to dislike her. The gender of the baby was a secret between the mother and her baby, the common shame that they shared with each other.

The mother had adjusted her attitude after the baby was born. She said : 'Although my husband's parents were expecting a boy baby, I felt better now because I felt that a girl baby was mine. When you have a boy baby,

you have him out of responsibility. You are giving a birth for someone to have a grandson. But a girl is mine. The reason I can come back to my own parent's home for the first month break is because the baby is a girl. (The hidden message is: 'since a girl baby is not the pride of the family, no one will compete to own the baby, and so she is mother's baby.' If it were a boy the mother would have to have the first month break at her mother-in-law's house because it is *their* baby. I have observed another baby boy. After he was born, the paternal and the maternal families compete to have the baby stay in their houses. I remember once a baby boy's mother saying: 'everyone is competing to have him.' She said it not with pride but rather with a sense of loss, in a depressive tone of voice.)

The grandmother brought in two cups of coffee and two cakes for the baby's mother and me. The mother introduced me to her parents as a nun, and I sensed the reverence in the air despite the fact that they are Buddhists. As a woman observer I was somehow received nicely by the family. Later, the mother told me that her parents said that men were 500 generations (lives) ahead of women and so women needed to bear children and suffer extreme pains from the delivery process. Her parents believed that the Buddhist nun and the Catholic nun alike are the most delicate among women, and are not far away from being men in their future lives.

It is the Chinese tradition that the father's family should pray at their ancestors' tombs on the 5th of April. If it were a boy baby, the family would be delighted to introduce the baby to their ancestors, but the father's mother told the mother she need not go to the tomb since the baby was a girl. The grandmother told the mother that maybe next time, when they have a baby boy, they can take him to visit their ancestors. Although this mother strives to love her baby girl, listening to these kinds of involuntary remarks somehow made the mother feel sorry and ashamed that she had not given birth to a boy baby.

The mother began to recall her own childhood. Being the second girl baby in her family, she realized how difficult it had been for her mother to accept her. She heard from her neighbourhood that she had created a lot of pain and shame in her mother when she was born. She had tried to forgive her mother for what she had done to her, but she found out that sometimes it is difficult to comprehend the reality that the culture had forsaken the second girl baby in the family. As much as she liked her first girl baby, the mother said that she did not know if she could persuade herself to love a second girl baby. The culture had created much terror in her for she knew that the second girl baby would not be celebrated.

The knowledge of having the baby girl terrified the mother and induced negative and shameful feelings in her. To the mother, under the influence of the culture, it seemed that the girl baby possessed some kind of evil quality, which brought her mother and family shame. The baby girl inside her, then, is harmful and dangerous. The mother needed to project these dangerous feelings outward in order to control this overwhelming destructive power (and also to protect the baby inside of her). And so the badness inside the mother was projected by her into the delivery experiences, the nurses and the books that teach about childbirth.

This belief that the baby girl was evil was inherited from the mother's own painful childhood experiences. Feeling unloved as a young child, the mother felt that she was at fault in her very existence. Hate was projected on to the girl baby inside her, and mother had phantasies that she could somehow destroy the badness of the baby. For fear that the dangerous urge inside of her might be destructive to the baby, to her own mother, her husband's mother, and to the external world that frustrated her, the mother would then bite back her words and withhold the truth.

The mother had experienced the terror of the delivery process and the unkind nurses as deliberately murderous. Without good enough holding, her frustration was difficult to contain. She then experienced the baby as a starved greedy child who tried to suck her dry. The pain of breast feeding became difficult to tolerate. The baby felt the anxious breast which her mother was reluctant to give. She sucked slowly to protect the mother, or perhaps wondered if she deserved the milk.

### **The baby at twenty-three days old**

While lying on her mother's lap, the baby started to yawn, trying to open her eyes but without success. She began to move her body around as if trying to diffuse all her energy. She kept on yawning and stretching and turning her body around, opening her eyes and then closing them again. After about three minutes, the baby gradually woke up and her eyes opened wide. She began to search for her mother's eyes and mine. She remained quiet and kept looking around. The mother said that the baby did not usually cry, and that she only cried when she was hungry, or when she could not fall asleep for a certain length of time. She said that she didn't cry if she was interrupted during her sleep. The mother then told me that one day the paternal grandmother woke the baby up from her sleep, and the baby did not cry at all. The grandmother played with the baby for

some time but then when she was done with playing with the baby, she simply put the baby back on the bed then left. At that moment the baby cried. The mother thought that the paternal grandmother was somehow selfish, and did not care for her baby.

The paternal grandmother treated the baby girl as if she were a useless piece of earthenware. The purpose of her life was to be used for other's pleasure, but not to be respected. During my observations, the mother and I very often sat silently without any conversation. Sometimes she would say to the baby, 'why is your life so dull?' The mother seemed to feel ashamed that her baby's life is so boring. 'Your life is more degenerate than mine,' the mother said. (She was referring to her resting at home for so long; she felt ashamed for not working. In the mother's mind her life is worthwhile only when she is working. Since the baby is doing nothing, the baby's life is worthless.) It seemed that the mother felt unable to express love for her baby in words. She seemed to feel ashamed to have given birth to a baby girl. Despite this observation, I felt that the mother did like her baby, but was unable to talk about her with affection or appreciation.

The silence between the mother and the observer seemed to be the result of a shared struggle to keep the bad object inside. When the bad object was released, the baby appeared to be an object of shame and was devalued in the mother's eyes.

Later on the mother began to feed the baby. The mother fed the baby with a bottle that had only a small amount of milk in it. The baby sucked the milk with great force, then expelled the teat. The mother shook the bottle and put the teat into the baby's mouth again. The baby tried to suck, but did not like it and spat the nipple out again. The milk ran down from the side of her mouth, and she started to cry. The mother wanted the baby to burp, and so she pulled the teat out of the baby's mouth. The baby stopped crying. The mother held the baby in an upright position, patted her back about twenty times, and the baby burped. The mother said to the baby, 'Everything is OK now, the air is out.' She then tried to feed the baby again, but the baby made a face as if she was very uncomfortable. The baby continued to refuse the milk while the mother kept on luring her to take it. I was wondering why the baby did not want to drink the milk while she was so hungry, and so I asked the mother what kind of milk was the baby drinking? (That is, was it from the mother, or was it cow's milk?) With hesitation, the mother said that it was her own milk, and that her baby did not like it. Then she said to the baby, 'It's so humiliating! This milk is mingled with my own blood.' The mother then

complained that the baby did not appreciate her breast milk from the beginning. The mother then picked up a second bottle, this time of cow's milk. The baby contentedly drank the milk in great swallows. The mother said, 'Just look at it, she simply wants to humiliate me.' But later the mother said, 'but I know the milk from the cow tastes better than my own milk.'

The anxious breast is experienced by the baby as a bad object. While she internalised the bad object, the baby hated herself and refused the breast. Through projective identification, the baby's hated parts of the self are forced into the mother, who is then identified with these parts of the self and hates herself for not having the good breast, that is the breast with good milk.

### **To love or not to love? (Culture versus the mother's personality)**

How did a mother struggle to love and hate her baby girl? What roles did the culture and the mother's psyche each play in this emotional interchange? How did a baby girl live through this ambivalent emotional world?

As much as a mother wants to love her baby, it sometimes gets rather difficult when a culture does not appreciate the birth of a baby girl. It was very painful to observe the ambivalent love in the mother toward her baby daughter.

### **The baby at 44 days old**

The mother was preparing a cup of coffee for me. I was alone with the baby. The baby while lying down opened her eyes wide. When the mother was walking away, the baby's eyes followed closely the sight of her mother's back as she walked towards the kitchen. The space between the kitchen and the living room seemed to be too long a distance for the baby's eyes to reach her mother. The baby's eyes continued to search for her mother. Then a deep frown appeared on the baby's face, followed by two bursts of crying. I stood besides the baby's cradle. She was aware I was at her side, and she turned her gaze on to me. She started to look intently on my face, our eyes then focused on each other, and she stopped crying. But after some time, she started to cry again. Then I pushed the baby's cradle, the baby stopped crying. Then she stared at my eyes, and started to cry again. Then I rocked the cradle and she stopped crying, but shortly afterwards she started to look at me, and in a few seconds started to cry again. This

time she cried with her eyes closed as if she was trying to avoid looking at my eyes, and to forget her mother's absence. Every time I tried to rock her cradle, she would temporarily stop crying and would follow my eyes intently, but before long she would start to cry again. This process continued for about four minutes. By this time the mother had two cups of coffee ready. She put them on the small stand next to the baby. I said to the baby: 'these eyes are not mother's eyes, are they?' The mother said: 'now I am in trouble, if she has to see my eyes.' While the mother was saying that, she had a very satisfied smile on her face. The impression I got was that the mother was very pleased that the baby had wanted her more than anyone else. Although she was slightly fearful that the baby would cling to her, she was, at the same time, glad that she was special to her baby. I could see the mother's dilemma.....

..... The baby was still making sounds as if she was crying. However, her eyes were dry. She cried hard as if she wanted to be held in her mother's arms. Mother then pushed the cradle slightly, so that it moved back and forth, but the baby kept on crying. Finally, the mother picked the baby up, and carried her in her arms, and sat down on the sofa. As soon as the mother picked up the baby and held her in her arms (in a perpendicular position), the baby stopped crying and rested very comfortably on the mother's left shoulder. The mother was sitting in a slanting position on the sofa. The baby rested on the left side of the mother's body, with her eyes wide open and facing away from mother. The baby appeared to be very comfortable and to be enjoying the closeness.

Later on during the observation, the mother told me that they had found a new nipple which the baby liked very much. The mother said: 'This new nipple was somewhat flat. The opening of the nipple is on the top, not in the middle. On the old nipple, the opening was in the middle. When the baby sucked, it irritated her throat, and she would cough violently, because the milk came out in a great quantity.' The mother continued to say that she appreciated the many new inventions that are on the market made convenient for babies by the manufacturers.' (This gave me the impression that the mother felt that the world was keeping abreast with the needs of the baby.) The mother continued to tell me that one of her friends wanted to buy presents for her baby. He went to the baby's store and was surprised to find the variety of items for babies. He regretted that his babies were born too early. He wished to have another baby to enjoy the many things of convenience. (It sounds as if the mother is happy that her baby is born at the right time. The whole world is prepared for her good baby to be born, and her baby is blessed with these good fortunes.)

When the mother loves her baby, and the baby sees her mother as special, a loving intimate moment is actualised, and there are good internal objects both in the mother and the baby. When those good internalised objects are projected outside, the world is good and pleasant and so are the mother and her baby.

The mother continued to tell me how much her baby loves this new nipple. Then she suddenly became somewhat worried that since the baby loved the nipple so much, perhaps some day she would not be able to take the nipple away from the baby's mouth. But although the mother was worried, she would rather see her baby rely on this new nipple than deprive her of it. She said: 'whatever may happen, let the future take care of the future.' (I felt the mother was worried that her choice might not be the right one). Then she gave two examples, of a baby who cannot give up using the nipple, and a baby who gave up her nipple naturally when she grew up. The mother was hesitant as to what her own baby would do eventually.

The mother pointed at the baby's face and said that it seems that the baby's skin is getting whiter all along. Then she put her hand next to the baby's hand to compare. The baby's hand is actually whiter than hers. The mother said that people often say that if a baby is born with a face which is very red, it will become very white as it grows older. The mother said that her baby was born with a very red face. She then got out two rolls of photos that they had taken when the baby was born, in hospital while the mother was lying in bed with the baby in her arms. Some pictures were taken while the father was holding the baby. One picture was taken with the baby lying on a red blanket. Her face was as red as the blanket. The mother seemed to be very satisfied that the baby's skin was turning white (There is a Chinese saying: the girl with white skin will have good fortune and will be loved by her husband.) She then turned over and praised the baby. It seems as though the mother was quite pleased with the baby.

At the same time, she bent over and gazed at the baby's eyelashes. They are very long and lifting upward. The mother seems to be very pleased with and enjoying looking at the baby's eyelashes. But not for long, for she then said that the Taiwanese people say that if a baby has eyelashes that stand up straight, it is a sign that he or she will be very violent when he or she grows up.

On the one hand, she loves to enjoy the beauty of her baby. On the other, she recalls what the culture says about the evil aspect of the girl's eyelashes standing up straight.

While looking at the baby's eyelashes, the mother remarked that all her time is spent looking after the baby. She said: 'she is lucky being the first child. She has all my time. The second child will not be as lucky.' (The mother being the second child herself always felt that her sister was more favoured, and that she did not get her mother's total love as her sister did. It is hard to decide whether the mother was jealous of her sister for getting all her mother's love, or whether she is trying to help herself to heal the deprivation of what she has experienced as the second child in the process of both giving love to and receiving love from her baby. From my observation on April 18th (the baby was two months old), I found that the mother was envious that her child was able to occupy her total love and time. The mother has already started to work. When she gets overly busy, she tends to complain that her whole time is occupied with looking after others, including her husband. On April 25, the mother appeared to be jealous that her baby was able to be comforted by the babysitter.)

All of a sudden envy was triggered in the mother: envy of her older sister favoured by her mother? envy of her own baby girl for being the recipient of so much love, even her own? envy of the baby-sitter because the mother missed her baby during the day while she was at work?

Later the mother mentioned that she has to start to work next Monday. The baby will have to be cared for by the babysitter. The mother cannot imagine how some mothers are able to entrust their child totally to the care of others, both in the daytime and at night. She can't imagine how can some mothers allow themselves to be separated from their babies.

It seems that the mother is very much attached to the baby, and is reluctant to leave the child to go to work. The baby is a part of her now, and so to separate from her baby is very painful.

The mother recalled that when she was pregnant, she could hardly concentrate on anything. Even in her teaching, at times, she did not know what she was talking about. The mother said that a couple of weeks ago, her students came to see the baby. They asked some questions from the book, but the mother realised that she could not recall the name of certain medicine. I said: 'it seemed that your whole attention is on the baby.' The mother said: 'yes, I am! I found that my whole person is totally preoccupied by the baby.'

As I listened to the mother, I recalled Winnicott's 'primary maternal preoccupation,' which means that the mother is not herself but exclusively devoted to her babies. It is really enjoyable to see the mother and the

baby so preoccupied with each other. Sometimes it is not easy to realise that I am not included in this total preoccupation. However, to see the mother gradually cut off from her desire for the baby, and the baby learning to blank out her need for the mother, was even more painful.

### **The baby at 7 months and 19 days old**

I used to observe the baby at the maternal grandparents' home since the mother went home to visit her parents every weekend. Before they left to go home, mother and baby would make a short visit to the home of the paternal grandparents. I sometimes observed the baby in her home, visiting when either mother or the baby-sitter would be with her. The following observation however was made at the maternal grandparents' home.

It was around 10 minutes to five and I had almost reached the grandparents' house when I spotted the grandmother among the crowds buying vegetables. I waved to her, and she responded to me. But right after her brief greeting she looked over my shoulder and said, 'Look, they have just arrived.' I thought that the mother must be coming. I was very happy and turned around and saw the mother holding the baby in her arms with the baby's father following behind. They were walking toward us. Both the grandmother and I walked toward them to greet them.

As soon as the grandmother saw the mother, she started to complain about the way the mother carried the baby: 'Look the baby is being carried like a little piggy.' The mother carried the baby in her right arm in an upright position. She let the baby sit on her right arm. But as soon as the mother saw the grandmother, the mother laid the baby down and caught the baby's stomach with her right forearm. Thus the baby was now lying horizontally, perpendicular to the mother's body, with her stomach on mother's forearm. The baby struggled to lift up her head and looked at the grandmother and me. In order to balance her body she made her body very stiff. The grandmother said, 'Just look at that, she is holding the baby as if she were holding a pig. Who ever would mistreat a baby like that?' The mother did not respond. She was telling us how the traffic was 'bumper to bumper.' Grandmother then said, 'You have a habit of always coming home late, at the last minute.' She then continued with her complaint about the mother carrying the baby like a pig. The grandmother then took the baby in her arm and said, 'Come on, let grandma hold you. Whoever saw anything like that, holding the baby as if she were a little pig?' The baby was sitting on the grandmother's arm silently as if nothing disturbed her in the midst of this quarrel. The grandmother quickly turned

around and walked towards her house and we all followed behind. The mother was trying to explain how busy she had been since 11 o'clock this morning. The grandmother was still jabbering away about how the mother mistreated the baby. The mother then said, 'I was the one who was being mistreated.' (By this she meant that she was so terribly busy that she hadn't had time to eat anything since breakfast.) The grandmother complained to the mother, 'How can you starve her like that?' Then she said to the baby, 'Oh my poor baby, you must be starved to death.' The baby's face looked blank, as if she was in a trance.

We were at the elevator. While waiting for the elevator, the mother again talked about the traffic jam on the way there. The grandmother made a restrained face as if she did not want to hear the repetition. The mother then patted the grandmother's shoulder and said, 'Mum, listen to me. Today we left the house at 11 o'clock.....' The grandmother still gave her the cold shoulder, as if she did not want to hear it. I felt that the mother needed someone to listen to her, and so I turned my gaze on the mother. Our eyes met while she was explaining how terrible the traffic was. From time to time she snatched a glance at her mother, hoping to catch her attention. But the grandmother showed no interest whatsoever. The mother looked at me and at the grandmother interchangeably and continued to say that she had left home at 11 o'clock this morning, and headed for the hospital because her husband's brother has been sick... They spent a lot of time waiting to see the doctor.

After they left the hospital they were stranded by this terrible traffic because the Democratic Progressive Party was having a protest demonstration on the street. The father said that it was because of the national holiday, and the traffic was restricted. Both of them were trying to explain to the grandmother why they were late. The grandmother did not want to accept their excuses. She continued to say, 'You are late like this every time.' The mother insisted on finishing her narration. Just then the elevator opened. We walked out. The grandmother was still complaining about how the mother mistreated the baby, letting the baby go for so long without eating anything. The mother repeated again that she was the one who was really being mistreated, and how she endured hunger. While the grandmother was opening the door, the mother murmured, 'There is no warmth at home at all.' The grandmother ignored what the mother said and said to the baby: 'You must be starved to death.' The grandmother seemed to want to blame the mother by intensifying her sympathy toward the baby. The baby, quietly sitting in grandma's arms, looked blank throughout.

While in the elevator the grandmother said that the baby stinks. The mother explained that the baby had a bowel movement while in the taxi. They had to change the nappy in the taxi, but did not have time to wipe the baby's bottom completely clean. After walking into the house, the grandmother hurried out with the baby in her arms and ran into the baby's bedroom murmuring, 'It stinks, it stinks... let's change the nappy immediately.' She took the baby into the room where the baby used to sleep. I watched the grandmother run into the baby's room and hesitate for a moment. The father also stood in the living room and seemed not to know what to do. The grandmother said, 'Come in! We are going to change the nappy'. I thought I might just as well go in to observe how they work together. After I went in the room, I saw the baby was lying on the bed motionless, still with a blank look on her face. The dirty nappy had already been taken away. I saw the grandfather sitting on the bed. He seemed as if he was just waking up from sleep.

The grandmother raised the baby's feet up, but she wanted to get the clean nappy, so she told the grandpa to hold the baby's feet. He did not seem to notice me. The grandmother came in with the nappy in her hand. The grandfather was still holding the baby's feet up. The baby lay on the bed very alert with her eyes wide open without making any sound or motion as if she was present in body but not in spirit. Mother came in the room and was telling grandfather about the traffic jam and the demonstration in the street... The grandfather just focused his eyes on the baby and said, 'You have thousands of excuses.' Then he continued to fix his eyes on the baby without saying a word as if he did not even care to talk to the mother, his daughter. The mother said, 'You do not believe me..' The grandmother interrupted the mother and said, 'Other people are very busy too.' (I think she was referring to me.) She continued to say, 'we should not make the sister wait for so long.'

The mother said, 'I was busy too.' (At this point I felt rather remorseful. I felt as if I were the cause of their squabble.) Then the grandmother said to the mother, 'You had better get going because you have made an appointment at five with the dentist.' I was surprised that the mother had a dentist appointment at the time when I came to observe the baby. The father was standing at the door of the bedroom all this time and did not say a word. The mother then told the father to go with her to the dentist. Before leaving, the mother turned around and said goodbye to me. I felt rather uncomfortable and sad that the mother was leaving the baby and me behind.

## The cultural psyche internalised by women

The birth of a grand-daughter triggered the bad internal object in both grandmothers. Rejecting her bad internal object, the paternal grandmother told the mother that there was no need to bring the baby girl to visit their ancestors' tomb. The maternal grandmother, likewise, did not appreciate her own daughter as capable of being a good mother. Both had projected their own bad internal objects on to their daughter and daughter-in-law, and made her feel bad and inadequate. As a woman observer, I somehow internalised this badness from the interactions between the grandmother and the mother, and felt guilty for my existence during the squabble. It seems that when a woman is humiliated and belittled by her own mother or by other female relatives, she feels so hurt that she cannot help it but pass it on to the females of the next generation. The grandmother was complaining that the mother mistreated the baby, but the mother herself felt mistreated. Whilst the mother felt that she was starved, the grandmother thought that the mother was starving the baby. The mother while entering the house said, 'There is no warmth at home.' The empty stomach symbolised her unsatisfied needs; for love, for understanding and for empathy. When the mother lacks the conviction of her own goodness, she cannot believe in the goodness of her own baby. The baby girl then dealt with her frustration by withdrawing her needs for love. She put herself in a trance-like state, to protect the goodness in her mother from being destroyed by the aggression that would have been triggered by her baby's frustration.

The grandmother wiped and powdered the baby's bottom, and put on a clean nappy. The grandfather then put the baby's feet down. The grandmother dressed the baby, and then laid the baby down flat on the bed. Throughout the whole process, the baby passively allowed the grandmother to move her body around. The grandmother asked me where would I like to observe the baby, right there or in the living room? I said 'either place will do.' The grandmother noticed the baby lying flat on the bed motionlessly, and said, 'The baby must be tired, let's have it here, so we don't have to disturb her.'

The grandmother watched the baby quietly on the bed. She bent down and said to the baby: 'You are really tired, aren't you!' A few minutes later the baby turned over and began to crawl. When she decided to get up, her movements were rather quick. I was happy to see the baby full of life again. The baby crawled quickly. she crawled all over the place as if nothing could stop her from getting where she wanted to go...

....The baby continued to play for about 10 minutes, then she began to show displeasure on her face, as if she wanted to cry. She began to pout her lips. The grandmother said that the baby was beginning to remember her mother and was missing her now. When the baby pursed up her lips as if she wanted to cry, the grandmother picked her up. The grandmother turned the baby's face toward the wall so that baby would not see the grandmother's face and recognize that she is not the mother. After the baby had calmed down, the grandmother put the baby on the bed facing the wall with her back toward the grandmother and myself. The grandmother tried not to talk as if she were afraid that her voice might remind the baby of the absence of her mother. This was rather effective, since the baby did not cry when she was facing the wall, nor did she make any movement. She simply sat there looking at the wall, as if to calm down, or comfort herself by giving herself some space and time. The grandmother looked at me with a sense of satisfaction, she smiled at me as if to say, 'Look, she is doing all right by herself.'

Throughout the observation, it appeared that the baby was learning to defend herself against separation or mistreatment, either by freezing up her body or by putting herself into a trance-like condition. She made herself become motionless and blank, so to separate her feelings from, or to forget about the unbearable, painful, unpleasant experiences. When encountering the abrupt separation, the baby in phantasy wanted to attack her mother for depriving her, in her dependency and need of her, but the baby also realised the goodness of her mother. So when her experiences continued to be intolerably frustrating, the baby blanked herself out and tried to make herself invisible, fearing that her destructive rage and hostility might otherwise burst out to hurt the good breast of her mother. (This is the 'depressive position' described by Klein).

### **The release of the bad internal object**

The grandmother said that she would like to cook some rice cereal for the baby and asked if I could watch the baby for a second. After the grandmother left, the baby was still crawling around carrying her toy chicken leg. After about five minutes, she suddenly stopped and sat up a little distance from me with her face toward me and began to bite on the toy chicken leg. Then she started to make some sounds. The sound were not sounds of excitement but of anxiety. Her voice was getting anxious and I felt that she wanted to ask me 'Who are you anyway, and where is my mum?' She kept on biting the toy with greater strength. Her mouth

opened very wide and bit on the toy from all sides. (Formerly whenever the baby was in a bad mood, the mother would shake the toy to make some sounds, and the baby would calm down somewhat. The baby now tried to imitate her mother by shaking the toy to make sounds as if she was creating a mother image to console herself.)

The baby was biting the toy with great force. Then she began to use the toy to slash the mat with even greater force. I was worried that she might hurt her legs, but she was very careful to avoid hitting them. She turned her body slightly away from me and continued to hit the mat with the toy. She hit it so hard that her hand began to bump the mat when she hit the mat with the toy in her hand. She hit it with such great force that I felt that the toy or the mat which used to be a consolation for her had become the bad object, the persecutor. All her discomfort inside had been projected outside, and this made the toy or the mat bad. She kept on striking the toy with even greater force. It felt as if she wanted to get rid of the toy, and make it disappear, but at the same time she was holding on to it and was angry at herself for not being able to get rid of it. As I was thinking about this, the baby began to strike her left leg with the toy, and then her right leg. Trying to protect the goodness of the mat by claiming all the badness herself, the baby began to hurt herself. Gradually, her actions became very disoriented. She wanted to strike the bed, but she missed it. She lifted the toy up high with her right hand and began to force it down, but half way down she stopped, and at the same time raised her left shoulder. She repeated this unfinished movement about twelve times and her left side shoulder became very stiff. This was very difficult to watch, as if the baby had suddenly lost track of who the enemy was. She did not know where to direct her anger, and her agony became so overwhelming as to be beyond her comprehension. It became so difficult for the baby to tolerate her anxiety that she lost the ability to contain herself. I felt like holding her and taking her to her grandfather. Suddenly she stopped striking and started to cry. I picked up the baby and was going to take her to the grandfather. Just then, I heard the grandmother calling her name. While holding the baby, I said to the baby, 'Where is your grandma?' At this moment the baby stopped crying. In an instant the grandmother came in and took her from me and said, 'You recognize faces now.' Grandmother carried the baby and walked to the living room. I followed behind.

When her frustration became overwhelming, the baby needed to control the bad object inside by projecting it outside. The toy and the mat which used to be the comforter (the internalised good mother) now became the

persecutor who kept the good breast for herself, and starved the baby or tried to deprive her by not giving her what she needed. (This is Klein's paranoid-schizoid position.) By hitting the toy and the mat, the baby was trying to manage the internal persecutory object. Through re-introjection of the frustrating object, she made herself a bad baby, and so began to hit herself. The baby all of a sudden fell between the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid positions, which made her bewildered in hitting the objects.

Fairbairn used the term 'closed psychic system' to describe the autistic encapsulated ego, whereby the aggression toward the outer object is turned toward the inner object (Fairbairn, 1952). When the baby began to hit the mat and the toy, it was as if the baby was keeping those aggressions away from the frustrating environment outside, and was instead making herself into the bad object. By attacking the toy and the mat, the baby was trying to attack her internal bad object.

### **Baby is eleven months old when the mother had a dream**

The mother is pregnant again. People have told her that she will have a boy baby because the first girl baby loved to be held by her grandfather. (There is a Chinese saying: if the first girl baby loves to be held by a person of the opposite gender, the second child will be a boy.) Others have said that her tummy looked rather round so she would have a boy baby. And still another has said that since her eating pattern is different from during her first pregnancy, which gave her a girl baby, this pregnancy will give her a boy.

Later on the mother dreamed that she gave birth to a girl, and the girl baby looked ugly. In the dream, the mother was terrified that she gave birth to such an ugly girl. She did not know what to do with this ugly baby girl. But later in the dream she realised that the baby girl looked like 'Bodhi Dharma', the initiator of the Buddhist Zen, who used to be a God but in order to preach truth to the gentiles, he became Buddha. Dharma too looked rather ugly. The mother said that in her dream a lady approached her and told her: 'Since this girl is the rebirth of Dharma, she needs to return to God.' The lady asked mother would she be willing to give the girl baby back to God? The mother thought that since she did not know what to do with this baby girl, she might as well give her back to God, so she agreed with the lady and felt relieved.

The mother tried to manage the bad internal object inside herself (the abandoned female quality) by projecting it into the baby girl inside of her. Her murderous wish to kill the internal bad object, made it difficult for the mother to want to keep a baby girl in her womb. But the mother's love supersedes her hate. And her desire for reparation was strong. The mother tried to save her baby girl by giving her back to God, and so that the baby would be saved from her mother's murderous wish. Ultimately, in this dream, the mother's generosity overcomes her hate.

### **Conclusion: the woman's dilemma**

The idea of having a baby girl had terrified the mother and filled her with hatred, long before she had a baby girl. For how can a mother be willing to be destroyed by her baby, as Winnicott had put it, if her culture does not appreciate the birth of a baby girl? The whole notion of giving birth to a baby girl created hostility in the mother. The physical and psychological changes during pregnancy, the painful delivery process, the loss of youth and her leisure time, the hurtful breast feeding, all meant that her motherhood became intolerable and disgraced. She experienced her baby's needs as overwhelming. Babies are like monsters that to suck you dry. A world lacking in empathy and compassion had placed the mother in an isolated situation as she faced this cold and needy reality. The birth of a girl baby was not experienced as a beautiful creation, but as a mortal tragedy. In this isolated place, the mother struggled to love her baby girl and keep her destructive hatred inside. The dreamed solution to the problem of the mother's murderous wishes, regarding the second baby girl, was to give the baby girl back to God.

### **The writer's countertransference**

While writing this article, the writer found that she lacked words to express the deep emotions within her, and which existed between the grandmother, the mother and the baby. (This was not merely because English is not her native language.) An inability to find the right words created within her psychic pain, feelings of abandonment and disillusion. Maybe she was terrified by the rage aroused by the situation of the grandmother, the mother and the baby, and the painful transactions between them, in which she felt helpless.

Perhaps the psychic pain she felt, of abandonment and disillusion, was the result of her identification with the women, as a woman herself. She

felt that the women in this family were alienated, abandoned, and unsupported by men, as they faced a world of emotional war. Accompanying the writer's feelings of abandonment was her rage towards men for their invisibility and non-involvement in the emotional struggles of the women. Where did men go in this world of emotional warfare?

This observation is one of four mother-baby couples that the writer has observed. In each of these observations, the writer found that the fathers and the grandfathers seemed to disappear in the midst of the women's emotional struggles. They seemed both to exist and to not exist. In the observation described in this article, males are both the superior beings against whom female babies are being defined as of inferior value, yet are themselves largely absent from the narrative. The writer wonders why men retreat from emotional involvement, and isolate themselves, keeping busy in their work. Maybe they are afraid that the mother-infant interactions will remind them of the frustrating breast they encountered as a young child and of shame at needing the breast. Perhaps they withdraw from emotional life in fear of being dominated by and dependent on the breast that frustrated them. By avoiding emotional involvement, the men in these families may have phantasised that they had protected women from being hurt by their envious hatred. In reality, they had left the women to struggle in isolation.

It seems that it is not what men have done *to* women but what they have not done *with* women that makes women feel victimised. Maybe with the support from men, women's needs for compassionate love and empathy would be less frustrated. With more good experiences inside, women would be able to incorporate love and lessen their need to project hostility and hate.

What makes the sun darken when a baby girl is born? The male, the culture, or women's internal psyche? This paper demonstrates that issues of gender involve the continuous interweaving of all three areas. It is a tragedy that men and women cannot accompany each other in confronting these inherited cultural expectations. This leaves females to deal with their emotional struggles in isolation. The women then find themselves impelled to pass on their sense of hurt, deprivation and worthlessness into the females of the next generation. The dynamics between men and women, and between different generations of women, create a culture which is cruel to women. This vicious cycle continues whilst women keep on introjecting a 'cultural psyche' that refuses to celebrate the birth of a baby girl.

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